

# **BEYOND RHETORIC THE GLOBAL JUSTICE CHALLENGE**

**Oxfam Community Aid Abroad  
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The "Global Justice Challenge" outlines Community Aid Abroad's views on what should be the global social justice priorities for the Australian government.

Community Aid Abroad's views are derived from our experience working with local communities in thirty countries in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Central America and Aboriginal Australia.

It is our belief that the pressing problems of global inequities, environmental degradation and abuses of human rights should not and, indeed, cannot be ignored by any Australian government. It does so at its own peril.

This document is a challenge to Australian politicians, of all parties, to consider the principles which should underpin Australia's relations with the rest of the world.

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## **1. THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

The beginning of the 1990s was greeted with great optimism. The Cold War had ended and there was a wide expectation that the end of those destructive tensions would open the way to a new era of international peace, prosperity and social development.

However at the half way mark of the last decade of the twentieth century there is little optimism. True, wars have ended - in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mozambique, El Salvador and Cambodia - and apartheid is no more. In many countries there is a greater openness which allows ordinary people space to shape their own future.

The lot of many in the developing world continues to improve. Life expectancy is now 17 years longer than in 1960. Infant mortality has been more than halved in the same period.

But the gap between rich and poor continues to grow - more than 1.3 billion people survive on less than a dollar a day and are denied their basic needs of health, education, shelter, clean water supply and sanitation. About 90% of the 17 million people infected with HIV/AIDS are in developing countries. As the gap grows so does the unwillingness of the rich world to assist the poor or to recognise that global security is integrally linked with the closing of the gap.

Armed conflict continues to plague humanity. But increasingly conflict is within national boundaries, rather than between nation states, with civilians in the front-line. Since 1990 the number of refugees and others of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has risen from 17 million to 27 million. The number of internally displaced people - those on the move inside their own country - has skyrocketed.

At one level the world's economy is becoming increasingly integrated. With the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the consequent creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the formal mechanisms for the integration of the

world's economy are in place. However, large sections of humanity are left out and marginalised. Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, hardly figures on the international political and economic chessboard. The situation of workers in the informal sector - 30% of all non-agricultural workers in Latin America, more than 60% of the urban workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa - does not rate a mention in international trade talks.

The global economy is now outside the control of national governments with transnational corporations dominant. Their ability to move capital, as well as production from one country to another, has reduced the capacity of governments to manage their own national economies.

But at the same time as the global market is being created, the world's political institutions are in growing disrepute. As demands on the United Nations increase, it is faced with declining and increasingly unreliable financing.

Despite increasing public awareness of the global environmental threats of land degradation, pollution of the atmosphere and waterways and the depletion of biological diversity, the international response is inadequate.

There are very strong tendencies towards isolationism in the richer countries of the world, particularly in the United States. The consequences of this turning inwards are becoming clearer. A world with gross inequalities is unsafe and volatile. Ultimately it becomes one where people and economies cannot prosper.

There are some voices urging a different way - a way that values internationalism and a sense of fairness and justice. The last decade has seen the growth of a global civil society, involving non government organisations and other community groups, active in virtually every country in the world. Their very diversity is their strength. On different issues they have forged different alliances, sometimes involving governments. A vision of the future, based on global social justice and the realisation of basic rights, is being developed and demands an urgent response.

## **2. AUSTRALIA'S ROLE**

Australia can play a pivotal role in the quest for global social justice. As a middle sized power, Australia can be an honest broker. As a foundation member of the United Nations, Australia has a long record as an active and constructive member. As a leading member of the Commonwealth, Australia has an opening to developing nations in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. As Chair of the Cairns Group we play a key role in international trade negotiations.

Australia borders both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and our leading role in the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum demonstrates we can help bring together developed and developing countries of different cultures and traditions.

Australia's economy is being internationalised. Trade is of great importance and much of our economic fate is controlled by investors and speculators many thousands of kilometres from our shores. In turn Australian companies are increasingly active outside of Australia, impacting on citizens and communities of many countries.

Australia is a stable parliamentary democracy and a successful multi cultural society, with many experiences and lessons to contribute to global stability.

Australia is a rich country - indeed according to a recent World Bank study, the richest in the world - but in our region live the majority of the poor of the world. What is taken for granted by most Australians is beyond the wildest dreams of many of our neighbours.

A fairer world is in Australia's national interest, however narrowly defined. An equitable and just world is a safer world and a better place to do business and to live.

### **3. PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION**

A commitment to mutuality and good citizenship should underpin Australia's policies and actions in foreign policy, trade, development co-operation and international environmental fields. 'Mutuality' refers to partnership and co-responsibility which leads to the promotion of global social justice and to the realisation of basic rights. 'Good citizenship' is based on an acceptance of Australia's responsibility as a member of the international community. It leads to a willingness to participate actively and constructively at both a regional and global level.

Arising from this commitment to mutuality and good citizenship are the following key principles:

- **Increased equity:** Redistributive measures are needed internationally and nationally to narrow the gap between rich and poor countries, and rich and poor people, Gross disparities of wealth and income are both morally indefensible and lead to an unsafe and volatile world.
- **Peace and Security:** Freedom from violence and from the threat of violence are basic rights for all citizens of the world. From supporting measures to alleviate structural violence through our overseas aid program to diplomatic and disarmament efforts on the international stage, the pursuit of global and individual peace and security needs to be central to Australia's international policies for a socially just world.
- **A Sustainable Future:** Responsibility for the good stewardship of the world's environment is one shared by all, but particularly by those richer countries like Australia which disproportionately consume scarce resources and which have the technological capacity to develop sustainable alternatives.
- **Participation:** Enhancing popular participation in decision making from the local to the global level is central to social justice.

These principles should be used to guide Australian policy makers. Systematic application of policies based on these principles would ensure that more people throughout the world would be able to enjoy their basic rights to shelter, education, food, water, health care, a say in their future, a safe and sustainable environment and freedom from violence.

#### **4. AN ACTION AGENDA**

Community Aid Abroad believes the global social justice priorities the new government should be to:

- **Renew Australia's development co-operation program**

Over the last decade, Australia's aid program has been reduced as a percentage of Gross National Product and has become increasingly commercialised. An Australian government committed to global social justice would:

- Publicly commit itself to achieving the United Nations' goal of 0.7 % of GNP being devoted to overseas aid and to announce a timetable for the achievement of the goal.
- Publicly commit itself to real increases in the aid budget each year and for increases in the GNP ratio each year with an interim target of 0.4% by the year 2000 (currently 0.33%) and 0.35% in the August 1996 Federal budget.
- Ensure that an increasing proportion of the aid budget represents a real wealth transfer to the poor and does not simply buy Australian goods and services.
- Ensure that Australia's aid program unequivocally prioritises eradicating poverty, with special attention to the basic rights of women and girls.
- Agree to devote at least 20 per cent of Australia's aid program to basic needs - primary health care, basic education, nutrition, family planning and clean water supply and sanitation - and to enter into policy dialogue with recipient governments to urge them to devote at least 20 per cent of their public expenditure to the same fields.
- Ensure that at least 10 per cent of Australian bilateral aid is directed towards long-term development assistance for Africa.
- Reduce expenditure on the commercially-oriented DIFF scheme and the Private Sector Linkages Program and ensure that projects funded under these programs meet stringent social and environment criteria.

- **Refocus on Africa**

Africa is the forgotten continent. Poverty is growing faster there than anywhere else in the world, and it is area of the world most adversely affected by the decline in official development assistance and the changing trade rules. Australia shares an ocean with many African countries and an Australian government committed to global social justice would:

- Broaden diplomatic relations with the countries of Africa by opening an embassy in Addis Ababa.
- Ensure that at least 10% of Australian bilateral aid goes to long-term development assistance in Africa.
- Develop a trade and investment strategy for the region.

- **Redirect the World Bank**

The World Bank has long been the subject of criticism from those concerned with social justice. There are, however some real signs of change. An Australian Government committed to global social justice would encourage these moves by:

- Supporting the establishment of a well-resourced Multi-lateral Debt facility which would adopt a comprehensive approach to reducing the multi-lateral debt burden of many low income countries.
- Working for the reform of the voting systems of the World Bank and other International Financial Institutions so that they more accurately reflect their membership and so that there is increasing transparency of decision making.
- Ensuring that World Bank policies and practices incorporate, abide by and promote internationally recognised human rights.

- **Develop a fair trade and investment policy**

Australia's trade policy has focused on trade liberalisation, with little regard for any social and environmental impacts. Simultaneously an increasing number of Australian based firms are investing in Asia and the Pacific. An Australian government committed to global social justice would:

- Promote socially and environmentally sensitive trade policies through international trade negotiations, particularly forums such as APEC and the World Trade Organisation,
- Establish an Australian APEC Social and Environmental Advisory Council, involving non-government representatives to advise the relevant Ministers and officials on the social and environmental implications of APEC's development.

- Propose to other members of APEC that an APEC Social and Environmental Forum be established to provide views from non-government groups throughout the region.
  - Promote and actively participate in APEC's Partners for Progress program so that it is a forum and mechanism to address equity and justice issues arising from the impacts of APEC.
  - Develop an enforceable Code of Conduct for Australian based firms operating in developing countries to ensure the best social, environmental and industrial relations practice.
- **Promote human rights in the region**  
 Civil and political rights are very often under threat in countries in our region. An Australian Government committed to global social justice should work actively and consistently for human rights by, amongst other things:
    - Ensuring that we provide a strong model of good governance with comprehensive compliance with international human rights instruments. This will necessitate a review of government decision making, in the light of the High Court's recognition of legitimate expectations, in its decisions in the Teoh case.
    - Committing Australia to the finalisation and adoption of the 'Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
    - Establishing a program, with the necessary funding, for regional NGO cooperation in line with the principles of this Declaration.
    - Working towards the establishment of an Asia-Pacific regional human rights forum in line with the commitment to establish regional human rights bodies in the Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights.
    - Working for a major reduction in the Indonesian military presence in East Timor and by supporting the convening of talks under United Nations auspices, without pre-conditions, involving the Indonesian and Portuguese Governments and representatives of the East Timorese community, including the East Timorese resistance.
  - **Ensure Environmental Sustainability**  
 Environmental problems demand an integrated global approach with implementation at global, regional and local levels. Australia's national interest is advanced by the effective tackling of problems of air and water pollution, land degradation and the protection of biological diversity, even if there are short term commercial costs.

An Australian government committed to global environmental sustainability and social justice would:

- Immediately develop and implement an effective greenhouse response strategy with the adoption of achievable, but ambitious, targets consistent with an internationally agreed timetable as set out in the Framework Convention on Climate Change.
  - Use the Australian aid program to assist recipient countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, in particular by focussing on renewable energy technologies.
  - Provide financial assistance to establish regional training centres to assist in the environmentally safe handling of hazardous wastes as well as supporting capacity building at a community level in the handling of such wastes.
  - Legislate to ensure immediate implementation of the decision of the March 1994 meeting of the parties to the Basel Convention to ban the transport of hazardous wastes for final disposal and take steps to ensure that trade of recyclables is eliminated by January 1997.
  - Immediately ratify the Convention to Combat Desertification and significantly increase development assistance to support the implementation of the Convention, particularly in Africa.
- **Strengthen the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**  
The rights of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world have been suppressed or radically subordinated to those of colonial or national governments. An Australian Government committed to global social justice would recognise that this remains an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and would:
    - Provide strong and active support to the acceptance by the UN General Assembly of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
    - Maintain the integrity of the recognition and implementation of native title rights and ensure that any changes to the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* are directed towards facilitating the native title claims process for claimant groups.
    - Promote models of development which empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consistent with the principles of self determination.
    - Rationalise service provision, particularly addressing problems arising from the multiplicity of decision-making and funding processes, especially the impact of the Commonwealth/States/Territories relationships.

- Ensure the urgent implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
- Ensure the rapid implementation of health programs in the areas of responsibility by the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.
- **Reduce conflict and threat of armed conflict**  
 Violence undermines development. Armed conflict is the major cause of the increasing flow of refugees and displaced people - more than 40 million and predicted to rise to over 100 million by the end of the decade. Excessive military expenditure is unacceptable at a time when resources for social development are scarce. An Australian Government committed to global social justice would:
  - Support a total ban on the manufacture, stockpiling, use, trade and exchange of anti-personnel landmines and actively pursue such a policy at the reconvened Conference to review the Inhumane Weapons Convention (to be held in April 1996).
  - Legislate to tighten Australia's arms export guidelines and approval procedures to ensure that no Australian military equipment contributes to repression or human rights abuses.
  - Ensure full and regular Parliamentary disclosure and scrutiny of all Australian military exports.
  - Propose the extension of the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms Transfers to cover all small weapons and the establishment of a one per cent levy on arms exports to fund United Nations conflict prevention initiatives.
  - Propose the establishment of a high-level expert committee, reporting to the United Nations Secretary-General, which would have wide-ranging powers to investigate arms exports and the subsidies to arms industry and to develop transparent systems of accountability.
  - Actively work for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.
- **Revitalise the United Nations**  
 At a time when a strong and vital United Nations is most desperately needed it is unfortunate that it is widely held in so low regard. There is a need to revitalise the decision making forums of the international body and to equip it to face new and emerging challenges. While hoped for reforms did not eventuate in the United Nations' 50th anniversary year, an Australian government committed to global social justice would actively work for:
  - Reform of the United Nations Security Council, including the removal of the veto power of permanent members and expansion of the number of

permanent members so that the Council more accurately reflects global realities at the end of the century.

- Reasserting the United Nations role in economic and social policy through the revitalisation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), including strengthening its capacity to coordinate the activities of the Bretton Woods Institutions ( the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ) and the United Nations agencies, funds and programs, with the establishment of regular and substantive dialogue between the Bretton Woods Institutions and UN agencies for more effective and efficient coordination of their programs.
- Developing an optional protocol to the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural rights which would provide a mechanism for dealing with complaints from individuals, communities and groups from member states on alleged breaches of this convention.
- Improving the United Nations capacity to respond to conflict, increasing the allocation of resources for preventive diplomacy and the establishment of an Office of Preventive Diplomacy. Australia should compile a roster of trained volunteer Human Rights Monitors who could be deployed in crisis situations under UN command.
- Establishing clear criteria for United Nations interventions in conflict situations and ensure that all such interventions have clear humanitarian and political objectives and are openly and fully evaluated. Support the creation of a UN rapid-deployment force which would be under the control of the Security Council and backed by fast track stand-by arrangements for the provision of troops.
- An independent source of funding for the UN, which is not dependent on the whims and changing priorities of national governments.